



Date: April 27, 2023
To: Project Files
From: Townscape, Inc.
Re: Pololū Trailhead Planning – Community Meeting #1

Meeting Attendees: Meeting attendees were asked to sign-in via a sign-in sheet prior to entering the meeting venue. A total of 78 participants signed-in. Participants from the consultant team included Gabrielle Sham, Rachel Kapule, and Sherri Hiraoka (Townscape, Inc.). The State Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) Division of Forestry and Wildlife (DOFAW) staff (Jackson Bauer and Steve Bergfeld) also attended the meeting.

This memo documents the in-person community meeting held on Thursday, April 27, 2023 at the North Kohala Intergenerational Center. The purpose of the meeting was to share a draft vision and issues for the trailhead and gather input from the community on potential solutions to address these issues.

Gabrielle Sham started the meeting at 5:00 p.m. She and Ms. Kapule provided a [slideshow](#) presentation that introduced the project and shared the draft vision and issues.

Questions and/or comments from participants are provided below. Comments were shared verbally as well as written down on the “Comment Form,” which were collected immediately after the meeting. Responses from the community meeting are shown in *italics*.

- Whose kuleana is it to manage the Pololū trailhead?
 - *The highway was transferred from State to County last year, so the County has jurisdiction over the highway. The parking lot is part of the forest reserve, so it falls under the State’s jurisdiction.*
- Pololū is a quiet place to observe nature. There are many other parks you have to get a permit to go to; this could be an option for Pololū. I noticed a big increase in traffic on ‘Akoni Pule Highway; I would hate to see it get worse.
- This is a County and a State issue. Whatever falls under State jurisdiction is their kuleana and County’s jurisdiction is their own kuleana. Someone from Kohala could have a designated area on their property to host the traffic and get concession from that. They could also transport visitors from one site to another.
- Great idea above. Could State DOFAW acquire land further up the road to create a designated parking area and transfer people to the trailhead? The parking lot at the trailhead would not be a parking lot, it would be a turnaround area. You could also have designated trash bins and regular pick-ups and some kind of bathroom facility. I think it would be beneficial to reduce littering. The amount of time a family spends hiking down and back, people will need to go to the bathroom.

- Pololū is a very special place. Could there be a reservation system where X amount of locals could go and X amount of tourists and limit that per day? There would be fees for the visitors which would cover the costs to manage that area, for example to repair or take care of parking area and trail. And you could hire local resource managers.
- It would be beneficial to have some sort of information or sign that visitors are required to read so that they understand the cultural significance, ocean dangers, that there's no bathroom, and the current weather conditions. I think this would solve a lot of issues with people coming unprepared and prevent a lot of accidents. Visitors should be informed before they arrive, before they are even on the road to Pololū. Currently a lot of the educational work the stewards are doing is right on site.
- I'm nervous about the idea of permitting for people who are born and raised here.
- My vision of Pololū is to stay as is; leave it a wilderness area and don't fix the trail. The \$500,000 should go to the stewards and the rest to Waipi'o Valley. Pololū should stay as is for cultural reasons; Kamehameha was born and raised in there. Everyone talks about tourists but we should talk about the environment first. The sunscreen is damaging the reefs. Pololū should be respected. Leave it alone. Don't put money on the trail, only a porta potty.
- Pololū was our playground. If you're going to change it, Uncle Bill Sproat wouldn't like that. It's not right to change that place. Should've done [something] years ago [to address the number of visitors]. The trail is dangerous. Pololū is supposed to stay as it is. I used to go fishing and hunting there.
- What we need to focus on is the Sproat homestead. Anything decided here directly affects them. Pololū should be left as is. There's always finger pointing with the State and County. It should be left to Big Island residents only for the trail. Visitors can spend 15 minutes at the lookout and take pictures.
- If we limit access that's the only way to maintain the environment. If it becomes a tourist trap and easy to go to then lots of people come. Then we find ourselves in a tourist circus. There's plenty of other places for them to go, they don't have to go to Pololū.
- I've witnessed the changes at Waipi'o. I am very much in agreement with the last few people who have spoken. Pololū is too small and delicate an area to change it for large groups. On special occasions, permits should allow people to go down. This is great looking far ahead but what about the immediate and the obvious. You should put a sign at Kēōkea saying "Last Bathroom." Let people know what to expect. This would help the residents that live out there.
- Everyone else (tourists) should not be allowed to go down into the valley. They can only come to take pictures.

- In court, a wahine from Florida brought out photos of when she was little there were big open spaces in Florida. Then as she got older, she lost these spaces to “urban sprawl.” Our community is small. We should meet and WE implement a plan, nevermind people from the outside. The community implements the plan. If there’s any concessions, have it enrich the community. When you have someone responsible for the mitigation factor, they will go ahead and educate the visitors, that’s the first point of contact. Only ‘ohana can go into the valley. There can be a spot where visitors get picked up, go to the site, then go back. This way education will happen before getting to the site.
- Most of us have our own access in and out of the trailhead. We’re not going down there just to cruise; we’re going for a purpose. We use the bathroom before getting there. If you can’t make it down, don’t go down. Things are changing to accommodate for those who have no business going down there. Who are we protecting? The people or the place? To me, it’s all about liability. No one wants to get sued. No one wants to rescue someone down there. We don’t go somewhere and ask people to fix it because we can’t go. Who is going to read a liability form? Mostly people won’t. I prefer to have you watch a video before you can go. Education is great. Educate people! Everyone needs to be educated. I tell my ‘ohana from the mainland not to go to Pololū, there’s no bathrooms and you can get injured. No one from Kohala tells their visiting family to hike down to Pololū because they know the conditions. Why are we changing Pololū for someone else to come in and they get hurt. Leave it how it is. If you can make your way down, go. If you cannot, don’t go.
- Educate visitors. If we don’t put money into Pololū to make it better, then people won’t want to come out. If we educate them on what could happen to them, like their children getting hurt and that there’s no service, then that could stop them from going. There’s too many people taking pictures of residents doing cultural activities and posting it on the internet. It’s like a broken car, eventually you don’t want to put money in it. Forget a bus and make visitors walk. Make it to where visitors don’t want to hike. Who are we protecting? What are we protecting?
- One suggestion on limiting access, put up no parking signs on the side of the highway from Makapala to Pololū with \$200 parking tickets and tow aways. And have a facility in Hāwī that would operate half a dozen buses to take people to Pololū.
- We’re doing this to preserve the cultural lifestyle for future generations. That’s what Pololū is. Kūpuna shared with me knowledge that was passed down: how to gather food and how to call fish out from the deep. Kūpuna shared knowledge to preserve the cultural lifestyle for future generations. We cannot engage in our cultural lifestyle because there’s no more place to park. I’m not going to park a mile away and walk with my fishing poles. The plantation days took away a lot from the people of Kohala. No can go ocean, no can go mountain. Lands were sold to people who put up fences and gates. Pololū trail was built by Hawaiians. I taught my sons how to fish Pololū but they no can pass it down. The parking lot at Pololū should be for Kohala people only. So that they can continue to preserve their cultural lifestyle. They’re not going down there to look at

the black sand or the rocks. They're going down for a purpose, to get food. Tourists can park wherever they like (besides lookout).

- Every idea has equal weight. People in this room have kuleana and they will pass it on and on. Why does my idea have any weight [as a newcomer]? Because I love Pololū doesn't give me a relationship to it. I wish people would look at it through this context.
- Can the State hire someone to be in the valley to watch all the people and make sure they're staying where they should stay? I've seen people going all over the place, off the trail. Who's going to follow up on that? Not the police. We need a park ranger. Those are the worst people, the ones who think they can go all over the place. Who can be in control of that?
 - *There is a grant to expand the trail steward program, and the State plans to hire an additional trail steward for inside the valley. There are also 13 new DLNR enforcement officers which should hopefully increase enforcement.*
- That valley is sacred; Kamehameha was born and raised there. My granddaughter had a good solution, you should follow up with her. I used to hunt and fish down in the valley. Leave it alone, don't change Pololū.
- You could issue parking stickers and reserved stalls for residents. You can't stop tourists from going down there but you could fence off all the sacred areas, maybe has to be 12 ft high.
- Pololū has become a sacred place for our family. The best time was during COVID when there were no tourists, and it was empty and beautiful. Is it possible, is it legal to keep tourists from coming down? Is it legal to do the permitting system? I like the idea of them watching a video or reading something. Maybe visitors can take a quiz so that they have to pay attention and they aren't just signing something. How can we go about restricting the access? With the \$500,000 budget, instead of using it to build a giant parking lot, could those funds be used to restore inside the valley, remove invasive species and plant native canoe plants?
 - *The \$500,000 is not for the parking lot. It's for figuring out the solution and what the community wants. It was appropriated by the Legislature to create a plan. The funding is not for constructing anything. It will also be used to complete an Environmental Assessment. If there's a need for construction the State will have to seek additional funding.*
- Thank you to the trail stewards, they've done a great job up there. Pololū needs porta potties and a spot for stewards to have an educational area instead of using the Sproat's property. Provide more money to the stewards to do more education. Have an area for the trail stewards to store things. Adding more parking will just add more traffic. Mahalo to the stewards, they're giving away their time away from their families to take on all that kuleana up there.

- Who's responsible will influence the solutions. My mother would go down into Pololū even up to an older age. In a park in Arizona, there's one road with a check in area, you have to buy a parking permit to go to the top and park. They had something where it costs \$5 and then as a resident you could buy a year pass for \$20 and you can go whenever you want, that worked very well. Pollution and litter went down, crowd went down after just implementing a \$5 fee. I could envision something similar for Pololū, with a check point. There's potholes where people park on the side of the highway, it's dangerous. I could envision a stand and charging visitors for parking, which allows for revenue for the person manning the check in. With bathrooms, trash cans, and vending machine for water.
- Pololū is sacred. You can't go running around a cemetery. Most artifacts in the Hawaiian Hall at Bishop Museum come from Pololū. You shouldn't fence off sacred sites because you're showing people where to go. A similar issue happen somewhere else where they told people that there were ali'i burial caves, and after all of it was dug up and stolen. People come in and help themselves to the valley and have no regard. There needs to be an officer down there, there are people that hunt down there with guns. If you give out too much information about Pololū to the public, they're going to come and see what they can find.
- We got to focus on our kūpuna that are buried down there. Cattle are walking all over that area. Should plant native plants on grave sites and fence it off. It feels like nobody cares about the place. I think we should focus on the environment and burials before any tourists go down there. We must protect our ancestors. Cattle is walking all over the place. Should fence the area or do something about the cattle. Sunscreen shouldn't be used down there at all. Anything man made is not good for the environment. Kūpuna first, the graves must be protected. Know that somebody has been there before.
- We're talking about how to protect Pololū. Got to start from the root, which is protecting the environment there. It's been a cultural practice site since way before us. I would like to see the parking area only for Kohala residents. Tour companies need to be educated, maybe hire someone to educate visitors and lead them on a guided tour down there. I don't like to see my community against one another. We all live on the same planet. We would respect other cultures, so we're asking the same of everyone else. If visitors want to partake, then come learn and let us educate you. Visitors are not entitled to make changes. Can you imagine someone walking all over your grave? I cannot. What that tells people is that those people that were here before us, who fought hard so that we can live how we live today, don't matter; we don't think like that. Take the money and put it back into the schools and give the youth a purpose to protect their land.
- The more I listen to what's being said, Pololū needs to have some sort of wilderness designation. Which means it's a different kind of space than just to visit. We need to back up and change our context on how we look at Pololū. It's an important indigenous place where the indigenous values need to dictate what's going on there.

- For us Hawaiians there's this challenge, the State and County doesn't care about us. Article 12 Section 7, the State shall protect traditional and customary rights, but it says "subject to the right of the state to regulate." That's the pilau part. How can the government regulate someone's religion? Until that changes, everything we find sacred cannot be trusted to the State or to the County, such as the burial treatment program. Hawaiian identity is being destroyed. We cannot rely on the State Burial Council because it's broken, and the State is determined to keep it broken. The visitors will still come, and it's up to us, the community, to look at how the revenues will be distributed. It should go to our community first to help us protect what we find sacred; the money should not go to the State. We don't need to wait for this \$500,000 plan.
- It seems like we're headed to restricting the number of people entering the valley; that's going to be a challenge. Hawai'i's dealing with increasing tourism all over the State. One thought is to come up with an optimum number of people that can be below the lookout at one time. From 8am to 5pm, once that number is reached, no one else can go down until someone comes back up. I walk the valley and I'm back up by 8am and there's not too many people there. By 10am there's more people.
- I haven't been down there in many years because of the crowd. The feral human colony, people living the valley, has that been corrected?
 - *Nobody lives there anymore.*

The following comments were received via the "Comment Form" from meeting participants.

- Do not want to be so straightforward selfish knowing most of the tourists are so hungry for the warm air and a place like Pololū Valley to hike with T-shirts and shorts, without heavy clothing/footwear for children. But as I hear the resident's voices I came to settle that Pololū should be kept as original as possible. I would like those many restrictions that came to be placed last few years to be lifted for Kohala residents and their guests to be able to explore the valleys freely again.
- Address the lua situation and place for porta potties on the mauka side just before the stone pillar. Cut the embankment back 8 feet from the stone pillar to the paved shoulder (100 ft approx.). Re-instate camping on a limited basis (10 to 12 campsites); our keiki deserve to be able to camp in Pololū.
- Buy the Mule Station to have more room and move the parking from the trailhead.
- Parking at the lookout should be for Kohala residents only, with stickers for the residents. Add signage at Kēōkea saying it's the last stop to use the toilet. Don't add more parking at the trailhead. Visitors should be allowed to go by signing up and paying for a tour. Tour guides need to be educated and be responsible for protecting and educating the tourists. Pololū should be designated as a Hawaiian Heritage place or "wilderness area." This should be used to protect the Hawaiian cultural and heritage. Keep stewards at trailhead and increase the number of stewards.

- Rather than increasing parking, decrease parking. Use some existing parking spots for stewards, info, etc. No vending machines with plastic water bottles please! They will stay in the bottom of the valley, water fountain/tap only. I'm not sure about the wilderness designation; it should be a people first, Hawaiians first designation. Should have permits to limit access.
- I'd like to see the trailhead a view point only.
- I wish the intro included exactly what the stewarding program is and is doing. Most in this room have no idea. They seem to not know the current problem of too many tourists is what is trying to be "changed." Not to change Pololū.
- Another thought is that if people had access only by van, the driver could be the educator.
- Why on your Project Location Map have you not noted the burial and other cultural sites?